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Torres, Drew Oral History Interview: History of Law Enforcement in Holland

Matthew Nickel

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Interviewee:
Ofc. Drew Torres
(Edited)

Conducted by:
Matthew Nickel
27 June 2002

ABSTRACT: (Topics Appear in similar order of Transcript)
Coming to Holland, Family, Career change to Law Enforcement, Holland Street Team, Holland’s History with Gangs, Gang Structure, Motivation of Gangs, Effect on Community, Reputations, Community Policing, Personal Experiences with Community Policing, Evolution of Holland’s Gangs, Firebombings, Innocent Victims, Leadership, Why youth join gangs, The gang youth are not inherently bad, Education, How the community can help
MN: Are you a native Hollander?

DT: No.

MN: So when did you come to Holland, what brought you to Holland?

DT: I moved to Holland in 1982. I am a graduate of the University of Kansas. My degree is in Journalism, and when I moved up here to Holland it was a chief photographer’s position at the Holland Sentinel which I held for about seven or eight years, and in 1988 I joined the Holland PD reserve unit for two years, and after getting a taste and a good law enforcement I decided to resign from the Sentinel, cash in some savings and put myself through the police academy which at that time was held at Kalamazoo Valley, and got hired on here in 1990.

MN: So do you have a family then?

DT: I married my wife Dee Dee, who maiden name is Komejan, and she is a native Hollander, she is Dutch to the core.

MN: Did you meet here then?

DT: Met at the Sentinel, and we were working and married in 1985, and three children, 16, 14, and 12.

MN: What are their names?

DT: Alex, Aaron, and Andrea.

MN: What prompted the change, your move to police from the Holland Sentinel?
DT: Actually, I always had an interest in law enforcement, ever since, while in high school, I joined the Navy for three years active duty and always had an interest and that sort of thing, although my field in Navy wasn’t anywhere connected to the law enforcement, but when I saw the benefits, of course the pay, the compensation of the police department here, that also showed me that I would better be able to provide for my family and I made the change right across the street.

MN: Did you have any kind of mentor or someone of that nature?

DT: In what field?

MN: In the police field, that encouraged you to go into law enforcement?

DT: Actually, to answer that question after not really having said it, but in the years I spent, John Kruithoff, who is now our chief, was a road sergeant at the time, actually was quite encouraging to me as far as getting myself through the academy, and getting hired on and what an exciting time it would be, so if anybody, it might be the man who just now happens to be the chief.

MN: That’s great! So what is your position with the Holland Police now?

DT: Right now I am on the Holland Street Team, which is a two person team that, has as a priority, drug investigations, and also street level crime, such as fights, gang activity, gang enforcement and that sort of thing. I am one year into a two year assignment, we work basically along side WEMET which is the West Michigan Enforcement Team, have you heard of it? Are you familiar with it?

MN: I have been told of it.
DT: Basically I run with that team and the Holland PD team, officers, there are two other officers assigned to that team. I have been doing that and before that I spent seven years as a community policing officer, the last two of which I was a school resource officer with community ed.

MN: How does the street team work in action? There’s two people on the street plainclothes, so what exactly are your goals out on the street?

DT: The goals are to be extra eyes and ears of course for uniformed patrol, of course we are plain clothes, plain cars, we are not that easily detected. We will stake out, we will sneak around and watch targeted individuals for basically the street activity. To better be able to act against those quality of life crimes that we speak of such as loud music, loud noise, public drinking, fights, street drug dealing and that sort of thing. Things that are visible, highly visible and annoying to law abiding residents, that is our focus really.

MN: How does the street team work cooperatively with the rest of the department?

DT: Even though right now we are a little undermanned due to retirements and such, but typically we would be attending briefings, work closely with the team area coordinators, which we call TAC officers, who are responsible for certain areas of the city, work with them in problem apartments, problem houses, problem individuals, basically that are being a nuisance to the neighborhood. And also with uniformed patrol, backing them up on streets on calls, helping with drug investigations, if they come across something significant, we’ll come in and take the investigation for them, which is fine because no one loves paperwork, and
they get in on all the fun and not have to do the reports and the follow up and that is great. Basically we are there to support and run drug investigations for them.

MN: How long has the street team been in existence?

DT: Actually since 1993, '94 when the Street Team as it is now came into being.

MN: What promoted the formation of the Street Team?

DT: Basically, to get the gist of what you and I are talking about, it was the quite visible street level gang violence that we were seeing in the core city area. And we needed an extra tool, and this street team was that extra tool to covertly surveille these individuals and these people responsible for all this street crime which was directly related to gangs.

MN: About gangs in Holland, do you think you can give me a synopsis of, an overview of Holland’s gang history?

DT: Gang history?

MN: When did it come about?

DT: In 1990ish, myself and Detective Al Rios, he is now Detective Al Rios, he was a street officer at the time, began a keen interest on why gangs developed in our community, and specifically why kids join gangs, and what can be done to prevent it, or intervene somehow once a kid is caught up in it. In the late 1980s, early '90s, a lot of area churches began to sponsor relocation of Asian immigrants, whether they were political asylum seekers or just relocation from such port entry cities in California as Stockton, Long Beach, Sacramento, and such areas like that. Mostly Laotian and Cambodian. Now, through these church sponsored relocation efforts, they brought with them a bit of the west coast, and
that happened to be street gangs. Until these kids came over with these families, we literally had no street gang presence in Holland. It was going around the country, it was almost in every large city, but not here in Holland, so when these few Asian kids show up sporting colors and claiming certain gang affiliations, a lot of the core city youth, who were Hispanic, countered what they perceived this threat and began forming their own gangs. Ten years, I'm sorry, 1990 there were none of these huge apartment complexes on the north side for low income. Basically, most of the low-income affordable housing in Holland was core city, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th streets in Holland. Van Raalte over to Lincoln Avenue perhaps. We had a lot of these Asian families in this lower income area, housing area, so they began to clash. We had young Hispanics grouping together to form a couple preliminary gangs called the Latin Alliance, La Familia, and a few others, but mostly those which today evolved into what we now know of as the Latin Kings. The first few Asian gangs to show up were... are you familiar at all with the People, Folk Nation gang structure in the United States at all?

MN: Very little.

DT: We have what are called essentially a West Coast based gang structure, and a Chicago based or mid-west based, and those are two gang structures and the two nations called the People and the Folk Nation. Have you heard of those?

MN: Yes.

DT: Essentially the analogy I like to use to describe it is: You have the American League and the National League in Baseball, well you have the People Nation and the Folk Nation in gang structure. With Major League baseball you have these
two leagues, and within these leagues you have different divisions and within these divisions you have different teams, and likewise in the gang structure you have the People Nation and the Folk Nation, you have individual sets and individual gangs within those sets. So for example the Vice-Lords, which is under the People Nation, probably have 13 different identifiable Vice Lord gangs in Chicago alone. They may quarrel, they may fight with each other on and off, but when push comes to shove, if another Gang under the Vice Lords is threatened by a gang under the Folk Nation, they will back each other. So just like you had the World Series in October to find out who is the best league and the best team representing which league, you have the People Nation and the Folk Nation and they back fellow gangs under those two nations under those two nations for any threat or any attack by a gang from the other nation. Here in Holland, the Latin Kings, they are a nationwide gang, they are a nation wide gang of course, and they are affiliated with the People nation. Most of these young Asian kids who first came in were aligned under different forms of the Crips which is a Folk Nation. Loosely related to Chicago, you have heard of the Bloods and Crips?

MN: Yeah.

DT: Bloods would be aligned with the People Nation, Crips with the Folk Nation. So the natural evolution of things was that if you have Crips coming into town represented by these young Asian kids, it naturally followed that they young Hispanic kids who feel threatened would align themselves with a people nation gang. There are several families in town of the Latin King leadership who have
strong ties to Chicago’s Latin Kings, basically in the late 1940’s was when the Latin Kings evolved in Chicago, but they are also nationwide now. So essentially in a nutshell with the variations having come and gone, the Latin Kings right now stand out as Holland’s largest, and in my opinion most violent and most aggressive gang that we have. It is Holland’s worst, it is not compared to big cities, but it is the worst we have got.

MN: Could you describe some of the characteristics of some of the gangs locally, what characterizes the two, stand out from each other and from the community?

DT: Basically their criminal activity. You have the West Ottawa Athletic Boosters Club, they have regular meetings, they share common colors, they have common motives to raise money for the athletic programs, but the difference is the criminal acts, whether it is arson, dealing cocaine, dealing marijuana. What characterizes them from the rest of the community is basically their thug life, to be honest with you, the fact that they are criminals. Most of the People Nation gangs, the Latin Kings here in town, they have families and hugely extended to families right here in town, strong ties to Southern Texas. The Asians on the other hand are more transient in nature, although we find that a lot of families who now have their extended families here and they are mostly on the North side living. To answer your question for probably the third time, it is their criminal behavior that sets them apart.

MN: What is the motive for that nature? What motivates these gangs to act the way they do?

DT: To carry out criminal acts?
MN: Yes.

DT: Probably the status, of the leadership. They get off on it; they support their own egos of course. Probably about 3 to 5% are true leaders and true hardcore thugs that never will change their criminal ways. The other 95% are just young kids just caught up in it. The money is quick and it is fast and its easy regarding the drug dealing, and to have maybe a dozen kids underneath you who worship the ground you walk on who will go and throw a firebomb on somebody’s house on your whim has got to be a power trip for them also. So I am thinking, what motivates them is ego satisfaction and criminal gain, financial gain.

MN: How are the gangs in Holland different than say in Chicago different than somewhere else in the nation? Is there anything that separates Holland from anywhere else?

DT: Not really. Except for the size. I think if we were a one hundred thousand instead of thirty-five thousand, I think it would all be proportional, the crime we see directly related to gangs. Not much at all differentiates the Holland gangs in their structure and their activity than any other city.

MN: Separate from criminal acts too, what effect do they have on the Holland community? How else to they effect the Holland community?

DT: Well, the reputations of the families, the kids themselves, the community itself, or the school, the simple reputation can affect, has affected. I have been to different training seminars and classes outside the Holland area and introduce myself as “hi I am officer Drew Torres from Holland PD” and I hear people from as far away as the other side of the state, ‘oh, you are that little town with all that gang problem’
while comparatively speaking, ours is no worse per capita than Grand Rapids which has several gang related murders a year, let alone the huge drug connections, but because we are this quaint little lake-side Dutch community that in the mid 1990s, '93 '94 '95 had this tremendous media attention grabbing activity as far as the gang fighting on the street, the shootings, the drive-bys, that our reputation really got soiled and we still have not overcome that. That is one way that Holland is different if I remember your question even now. What was the other part of your question?

MN: The effect on the community, besides criminal activity?

DT: The effect on the community, well its reputation, it’s sense of safety that the citizens lost. People still won’t go to the 7-11 after dark because of the reputation the 7-11 had in the mid-1990s for being a haven and a flashpoint for a lot of gang violence. Even though in December 1996, being that area was my community policing area at the time. I recorded my first entire weekend, Friday through Sunday, through Monday morning without a single police call. In otherwords our presence there and the work we have done there has been so successful that I would send my kid there after dark to buy a gallon of milk from there without fear of anything happening, it has just been that quiet and that safe, but the reputation still lingers about that whole area.

MN: What was your experience with community policing like?

DT: Very rewarding, for me. There are police officers, and both have their place in police work. There are police officers who like to go out an write an entire book or two, 25 or 50 tickets in one shift on the highway for speeders and seatbelts.
My style of policing is to go and park the cruiser at the 7-11 get out and talk to people and get to know them, find out what is happening, and that is how being able to get into community policing I was able to do that full time, so that was what was rewarding for me for community policing, to really get to know people, get to gain their trust, not contact them because someone in the family had to call 911. Just stop over chat, what’s up, what going on? And they come to me with a lot of stuff.

MN: What kind of effect does that have being able to get so close, being able to talk, getting into the community, what effect does that have on the community and your role as a police officer?

DT: The effect it has on the community, they know the officer more than just the uniform and the car. They say, “hey you know I have got this problem, I am going to give officer Torres a call, we are going to give officer Torres a call and we will leave a voicemail for him and ask him to stop by and we will bounce this off him. And it could be something that they would never think of asking a police officer or never think of calling 911 for but it was easy enough because they got to know me, or any of the other community police officers well enough to just be at personal level for them, they kind of become their own personal contact at the HPD. For me the most rewarding part is being able to have a greater since of helping, you always hear “why did you want to become a police officer?”, “well I want to help and give back to the community.” Well, in most of the cases that actually is true. You get great satisfaction out of being able to give simple advice, or helping somebody out in court or with an attorney or a boyfriend that beats
somebody up on a daily basis. Be able to intervene somehow outside the routine 911-call reaction, and it gives a good sense of accomplishment and job satisfaction.

MN: Do you think that community policing helped working with gangs, dealing with gang problems?

DT: Sure, it did. That was one of the motivations for the street team but also to get the community policing officers into the specific neighborhoods, give them time to be on bikes, to be on foot, to get to know the residents. The greatest tool really for measuring the police effectiveness is the residents' perception of safety, not necessarily the hardcore numbers and statistics, rather, do you feel safe walking in your neighborhood? And if you didn’t before community policing came to your neighborhood and you do now, then it was a success. Nevermind calls are up 20% maybe, that’s because citizens are more willing to call and report crime and the numbers artificially go up even thought the activity is the same and we can deal with problem people on a more targeted basis, instead of keep going back, keep going back. We get environmental health involved, we get probation involved, we get child and family services involved, child and protective services involved, and that sort of thing. And we do a lot more interaction with human services type agencies to help solve the problem.

MN: How have gangs really evolved since the firebombings, I have been told they peaked and they come back and they kind of go back and forth, where does it stand as of now?
DT: We are looking at a kind of a cycle over the last 12 years of heavy enforcement and a lot gang leadership goes down and goes to prison, things will fade quickly, in '96, '97, our information was that the Latin King powers that be over in Chicago, actually pulled the crown, in other words, put Latin King activity over here meaning they couldn’t go out and represent and couldn’t go out and paint their graffiti, couldn’t wear their clothing or display the colors because they attracted so much negative publicity and attention from the police because they were just running. They were being crazy, doing crazy things, and dropped off, and then we had 1999, when 407 College (Ave.) burned to the ground by actually four persons, two of which are serving federal time right now, one other state prison time, one is still a fugitive, and now we have just had the indictment, if you remember recently on a young man named Eric Ruibal, indicted, and has plead guilty and gets sentenced next month or this month, and they are going to be doing some serious federal time. Right now it is kind of on a downside, but we have younger kids, 14, 13, up to late teens. So right now, this summer, 2002, we are having a lot of pretty visible activity between the Latin Kings, young Latin Kings, gunplay with a group called the SUR13, it is an offshoot of the Sureños from California, south Texas area, mid-Texas area, kind of having a conflict with the Latin Kings.

MN: How did the whole firebombing incident come about, were their motivations behind it?

DT: Well, the motivation for the leadership who gave the orders was to keep their group cohesive. In other words, just like with Saddam Hussein, if you stay at war
with Iran or the United States for dozens of years on end you give your nation a mission, a distraction, despite the pathetic condition inside the country. Same thing with gangs, you give them a target, you get to coalesce the group into a common goal. At that time it was the African-American crack dealers at that particular corner on 17th and College avenue, nevermind the great amounts of cocaine, marijuana that the Latin Kings were responsible for, but they perceive these young blacks from Chicago with their Gangster Disciple ties, which is a major, major, the largest criminal street gang in the nation practically, the gangster disciples belong to the Folk Nation so they are enemies of the People Nation and the Latin Kings. So the motivation for all that firebombing activity in 1999 was to keep the group focused and give it a goal and they happened to be criminal activity.

MN: Now have the gangs ever gotten unaffiliated parts of the community involved? Have they ever committed crimes against the community, has it only been gang against gang?

DT: For the most part it is targeted. As gang members know, there’s somebody that somebody knows the gang is after them then it becomes kind of a thug thing. But there are innocent victims also. You had a case of two young Latin Kings who were drunk they needed money, needed more beer, they strong-armed (robbery) this guy, took his wallet, bought some beer at the 7-11. Went walking by the same intersection that they just mugged this guy at, and as he gives the description to the police he turns and says “hey, those are the two guys right there.” So it kind of gives an idea of the wattage between, running between the ears there of some
of these kids. But on occasion, you will have the innocent victims, but it’s unusual.

MN: What kinds of practices do they devote their energies towards, you have talked about drugs, criminal activity, what specifically do they use their energy towards?

DT: It is what the leadership directs these young kids into. That is dealing their drugs and going out and shooting up houses and firebombing them or just beating people up. That is where all their energy is focused. The young kids are focused on pleasing the old leadership. The older leadership is focused on keeping the group cohesive and disciplined, and that is to deal out the discipline when they have infractions or violations and basically be a parent to these kids. I don’t know if you were going to touch on this later about why kids end up in gangs in the first place. Generally speaking, with some exceptions, a kid will be attracted to the gang style, the gang lifestyle, seeking what he does not have at home. If there is not strong role model, no male role model in the house, he is going to find one in the gang. If there is no discipline or structure at home, he is going to find it in a gang. Even though a 14 or 15-year-old won’t tell you, it is good to feel secure knowing “what I can or cannot do”. They cannot articulate that, but they know that gives them a sense of security. When they join a gang and have someone telling them what to do, “you can’t do this, you must do that” and “here is what is going to happen if you disobey”, it gives a kid a sense of security. Child psych 101 right? That’s that, that is why a kid would be attracted to gangs, because the leadership satisfies itself, it keeps their, like I said, their egos boosted to be in charge of this group even though it is a criminal gang.
MN: How do gangs find new members?

DT: Recruiting could be simply asking those middle school kids "hey do you want to run with the Latin Kings?" "Do you want to run with whatever whatever?" You might have an older sibling (in a gang) and the younger siblings were doomed to be recruited somehow, to be asked. You could have kids move to town who once belonged to a gang under the same nation, you will very rarely have them crossing the nation line, so you might have a kid from the Vice Lords in Chicago moving in town because him mom and dad moved here or his mom moved here, and he will start running with the Latin Kings because they are considered "first cousin" gangs. The associated both under the people nation so you would run with them.

MN: Are there any myths about gangs in town, or misperceptions?

DT: Gee, I don’t know. By law abiding citizens of them?

MN: Yes.

DT: Boy. I am not sure. Not having ever polled or really asked anybody what their perception of kids in gangs in this town. I would imagine that the greatest misconception, myth is that every young kid who is in a gang is a hopeless career criminal. Whereas you get a lot of these kids one-on-one, they don’t want to be doing this criminal stuff, they know that they want to make Mom happy or somebody happy legally, morally right, but they are caught up. So the perception might be that ‘yeah, all those Latin Kings, put them all in a field with a gun and let them shoot it out.” Maybe 90% of them, if you can give them a structured, enriching environment to grow up in, and stay in school, while in this
environment; they will never have a need or a desire to join a gang. So I think a myth is that all kids associated with gangs are pathetic criminal losers.

MN: Has there ever been a case where a gang member in Holland has abandoned those roots after an incident or something and helped the Holland Police out or help in prevention or anything of that nature?

DT: There is one man you may be interested in talking to. I have my own opinion of him; his name is Carlos Lopez. He goes by a nickname of Chucky. He claims to have found God, he was a Latin King at one time. He lives on the north side now, has kids in school. Appears to be trying to make an honest go at life. His ties to the Latin Kings, however, are still strong, he still has friends tied in, so he definitely, so you first part of the question about helping us out, yeah that’s how we get federal indictments, because people talk. Anytime one of these kids are faced with serious criminal prison time or jail time they will cooperate almost to the person. Maybe with a 2% exception will cooperate to the person just to save themselves from additional prison time or jail time. A few have tried to (get out of a gang), you have term “blood-in, blood-out”, “get jumped in, get jumped out” where kids try to get out of the gang, get their beating and stay clear, and get on with life just like anybody else. there are kids who try to get out, get beat, get out for a while and get right back in it. It happened to a guy name Inocencio Mireles once. Rocky Mireles, who is now doing a federal prison term, a five year term, had gotten beat out once, but he got right back into the fold because the family structure was not there to keep his interest to keep him focused to keep him busy. He fell right back in there and was one of the persons who helped manufacture the
firebombs and direct the little kids on how to throw them, to light houses on fire and burn them down.

MN: What kind of, there is SAVE and there is GREAT and these kinds of prevention programs, what kinds of education things do you do, the Holland PD?

DT: Well, we teach SAVE and we teach GREAT as you mentioned, and that is it for the education programs. We dropped DARE for GREAT. Because so much of DARE is now incorporated into every-day curriculums that the schools themselves teach, we focus more on SAVE regarding violence and GREAT regarding gangs, to just make kids aware that there are alternatives and that it is okay to reject recruitment, but more, just as importantly, I would say having the officers being as aware as we are at HPD for the warning signs of gang infatuation or a kid starting to flirt with gang life to be able to intervene somehow to get them to turn back in the right direction.

MN: Does the street team gets involved in these education programs?

DT: Not directly, not in the classroom.

MN: So the street team is more enforcement?

DT: Correct.

MN: What might I have missed, what would you want people to know about gangs tat may have been covered may not have been covered?

DT: For those who have the resources in this community who can help, and this community has helped greatly, Boys and Girls Club, MAC Recreation, and other things that are alternatives that keep kids busy in a lawful environment so to speak, to keep giving, to keep supporting those programs. But also to be quick to
show your intolerance of any gang activity, whether you are a teacher and you start seeing it in a kid at school. Whether you are a business man and you can tell a certain group of kids “you don’t come on my property representing like that” showing, flashing your signs, or representing by your clothing wear. Be aware of what the signs are and don’t tolerate it in the least, either by support for programs or by telling the city commissioners that yeah you will pay an extra mil a year on your property tax to support police officers, for action, support the courts, get judges in there who will give harsh fines for people directly related to gang violence which our district courts and circuit courts have. There are all sorts of things but basically educate yourself as a lawful resident on what gangs are and what they do and what they look like and somehow contribute whether it is in taxes or direct donations to programs, just don’t tolerated.

MN: Well thank you.

DT: That’s it. It has only been 45; I could go another 45.

[Laughter]

MN: That would be fine!

[Tape Stopped]

DT: Just to give you a sense and I am looking up here at this poster up here that I have had this whole time and I should be sharing it with you. You know where the Columbia One-Stop is right? Where all your buddies go and buy their beers right?

MN: Exactly.

[Laughter]
DT: Across the street there is a Super Mercado (Mexican store). This man, Mr. Naverate gave permission to a couple of spray paint artists to draw a mural on his store side representing Mexican culture and heritage. They showed him a sketch of what they were going to put on his wall. These kids were known Latin Kings. By definition they were Latin Kings, but they were spray paint artists as well. Well what this little sketch that Mr. Naverate thought they were going to put on turned into a, essentially turned out to be a Latin King memorial to this young kid named

[Second half of interview recorded poorly]
A familiar face behind the badge

Holland police officers work hard to gain trust in community.

A FAMILIAR FACE: Community Police Officer Drew Torres talks with children in the neighborhood he patrols daily.

"Hey buddy," yelled police officer Drew Torres from his cruiser to a young man passing by in a minivan. "I thought you had a truck."

The young driver replied: "It broke down. How you doing?"

Toward the end of the block, Torres pulls over to the curb as he spots some youngsters. They run to his cruiser, giving him high-fives and asking, "What's new?"

This is Holland's inner city. These are the neighborhoods Torres, one of seven community policing officers in Holland, knew for a different...
reason just a few years ago.

"None of this would have happened six years ago," Torres explained. "The kids then were afraid of the police and ran from them."

Under the community police concept begun in 1994 in Holland, officers such as Torres visit elementary schools and talk about safety and crime prevention and make themselves visible as a person, not just as a policeman or authority figure, said Torres, a nine-year veteran of the force.

The program seeks to make neighborhoods safer by offering personal service, discouraging drug trafficking and crime and solving disputes before they become full-blown problems.

The seven community officers are assigned to separate neighborhoods and patrol in cruisers, on bikes or walk the beat and get to know the residents.

Funding for the community policing programs comes from the federal SCORE (School Community Outreach Endeavor) administered by the Michigan Office of Drug Control Police and expires in September.

Sgt. Bob DeVries of the Holland Police Department is submitting an application for a four-year renewal of the grant which would provide $358,000 the first year.

"We are hopeful of having it renewed based on our past performance and proven track record," De Vries said. "We have accomplished many of our goals. There has been a reduction in certain types of crimes among juveniles, but juvenile violence still remains a target of our activity."

"We can tell a lot about what is going on in the neighborhood just by talking with people," Torres explained. "Sometimes their answers are slow in coming or they don't look at you and you know something is not right," he added.

And by knowing who lives in the neighborhood, it is easy to spot strangers and unfamiliar vehicles,
"We can go into the schools and talk about gun safety and then you have a shooting in the neighborhood a day or two later and the message takes on more meaning for these kids," **Torres** said.

He talks to classes at Community Education and takes a couple of students to lunch twice a week.

"We have a contest and two winners go to lunch with me that day," **Torres** said. He used to pay the tab himself but now Arby's Restaurant helps out, he said.

Arby's on South Washington Avenue manager Carrie Kamphuis said she was glad to provide the lunches.

"It's good to see someone out there helping these kids and we are happy to be a part of the program," she said.

A call to a residence on a neighbor complaint allowed **Torres** to use his diplomacy. Youngsters from one home were bothering children next door and he explained to the accused their actions were not appropriate behavior, asked for their cooperation and said he would be back in a few days to check on them.

He handed each of 3- and 4-year-olds a Cop Card, similar to baseball cards, with his photo, some personal data and a safety message, chatted some more and then consulted with the parents.

"These cards are great icebreakers with the kids," **Torres** said.

For Amy Taylor, the community officer at Meadowlanes and Harbor Village apartment complexes on Holland's south side, the situation is different.

"Here we have a lot of people living close together in rental units and a lot of people who come to visit and create problems," she explained.
"We know who belongs here and those who don't we can have barred from the property by working with the managers."

That's one of the advantages of her neighborhood - the ability to work with the managers who can control offenders or offensive behavior through threats of evictions.

With more than 240 units, every week new residents arrive and others leave, making it hard for Taylor to establish relationships.

On June 13, a block party is planned in the parking lot of the former Family Fare store in Van Raalte Square shopping center. Food is being donated by a church, the fire department will be represented and there will be games and prizes.

"With few stores to walk to in the neighborhood it's difficult to get merchant involvement," Taylor said, adding that services and stores needed by the apartment dwellers have left the neighborhood making it difficult for persons on limited income to obtain the necessities.

Torres visits a family on his beat whose daughter is graduating from high school. He gets a verbal invitation to attend a family reception.

"You get a lot of invitations to weddings and births and birthdays," says Torres. "You do get to know the extended families."

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Mural is graffiti as art

Local men decorate wall of central city store

By PAUL VAN KOLKEN
Staff writer

Two self-taught graffiti artists using spray cans and air brushes have transformed the side of a building at 17th Street and Columbia Avenue into a piece of art.

"It had been graffiti before, but it was not classy so we approached the store owner about doing a mural," said Freddy Rodriguez, 19.

After the owner agreed and city officials gave the unorthodox project their approval, Rodriguez and his friend, Luis Ibarra, 20, of Zeeland, took the first of 40 cans of spray paint to the 50-foot-long brick canvas on the side of the Mi Favorita grocery store. They started their work last Monday and completed detail work Friday.

The design centers around a chained Aztec king. On the left is an Aztec calendar and the face of a girl in the clouds. To the right is an eagle with a snake in its mouth, a symbol from the Mexican flag.

On the bottom are the words: "If graffiti is a crime, then may God forgive."

Rodriguez says he learned art by doing -- and some of that doing was in Texas on buildings and fences, which eventually got him into trouble with the law.
Ibarra said that in Mexico he painted murals on buildings and designed T-shirts, many on request.

The two set out to find a space to display their talent and ran across the wall, approached the store owner and got permission.

"I got so excited when they let us do this," Rodriguez said. "I couldn't sleep that night."

The wall allowed them to put their artwork in place and put their names on it, Rodriguez explained.

"A lot of people do graffiti but it is not art. This way we take our time and we're not afraid of getting caught," he said.

The pair bought their own paint and spent afternoons and early evenings outlining and filling in with spray cans. An airbrush put in detail work, bringing out the design. Ibarra handles the airbrush.

"I want to do detail work on hoods of cars," he says.

Virginia Hernandes, manager of Mi Favorita, likes the mural.

"I don't understand all the lettering but it is beautiful work," she said through an interpreter.

She hopes the mural will stop others from painting unwanted graffiti on the building.

Across the street Maira Chaverria, 11, has watched the painting develop from her house.

"I can't understand what it all says but it is really cool," she says.

Added her friend Maribel Mireles, 10, "It's fitting that it is on the side of a Mexican store."

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Gang Identification

Basics for Law Enforcement

Presented by The Holland Police Department

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LEO Definition of a criminal street "Gang"

- An organization of three or more persons which:
  - adopts common symbols, hand signs, colors & philosophies
  - engages in criminal, anti-social activities including: narcotics trafficking, robbery, assaults and weapons offences
  - ruins the reputations of individuals, families, schools and entire communities
Why kids joins street gangs....

Cops see the reasons everyday on the job:
- little or no parental involvement
- lack of encouragement from a positive adult role-model
- looking for "something to do"
- need for a sense of "belonging"
- un-conscience need for discipline, rules & boundaries

Origins of modern Street Gangs
- Chicago based

- Formed in the Illinois penitentiary system in 60's & 70's
- Two "Nations" developed
  - "People"
  - "Folk"
- Released and paroled into society
- Continued prison crime and vice on the outside
- By early 1990's, existed in most cities and towns nation-wide

David Barksdale
Founder: Gangster Disciple Nation
Gang “Nation” structure...

“People”
- Represent to the “LEFT”
- Basic colors: RED, BLACK & GOLD
- Claim the “Five-Point”, crown or star & down-turned 3-point pitchfork
- Holland-area gangs include:
  - Latin Kings
  - Vice Lords
  - Bloods
  - Black P-Stone

“Folk”
- Represent to the “Right”
- Basic colors: BLUE, GREY, GREEN & WHITE
- Claim the “Six-Point” star, up-turned 3-point “Pitchfork” & other symbols
- Holland-area gangs include:
  - Crips
  - TRG - Tiny Rascal Gangster
  - GD - Gangster Disciples
  - Spanish Cobras
  - Two-sixers
  - Latin Disciples

“People” Nation graffiti
“Folk” Nation graffiti

Gang tattoos
Gang hand signs

Folk
Latin King
Vice Lord

Support your local Gansta’ Rapper...buy his CD’s now!

Calvin Broadus is an EAST COMPTON CRIP

Artist: Snoop Dogg
Album: Tha Eastsidaz
Song: Tha Eastsidaz

...Them eastside niggas be the crib, crib, craziest
Ride wit my niggas fool we gon die for this...
...The plan don’t stop nigga, fuck the cops
If a nigga simlich he the first nigga to drop....

...We Tha Eastsidaz, what define us, is we ridaz
And when we come through real niggas stand
beside us Killers, cutthroats, and
knives
Bringin it the liveest, and leavin no survivors...
LEO attitude towards gangs...

- Regarding those few youths infatuated and displaying gang characteristics: DO NOT IGNORE THEM. They ARE future gang leaders!
- Some call younger kids "Wannabes", do not do this. It infers that they are somehow less dangerous or serious. WRONG!
- By overlooking the fact that these youths have adopted a gang name, use gang signs and symbols and commit crimes, these kids one day WILL BECOME gangsters.
- Failing to recognize or denying the existence of gang association, whether willingly or through a lack of gang identification training, drastically increases the gang's ability to thrive and develop a power base in your jurisdiction.

Dealing with known gang members.....

- When you can, do not tolerate any public "representing" by the gang member
- stop and chat, face-to-face, get to know them
- know how to appeal to his sense of respect
- be very firm, no B.S., a younger kid will respond
- learn about his family, school performance, hobbies (he probably has none)
- let him know your feeling about representing to the left or right and wearing colors of his gang affiliation
Because if we, as Police Officers, don’t intervene when we can....

...then we must deal with this 8-month-old when he can actually pull the trigger!

Can YOU make a difference?

Deal with him now... ...or someone else will later.

Thank you for your attention.
The Holland Police Department
Holland, MI
Police department is on the Web

Wednesday, August 5, 1998

BY ART AISNER
Staff writer

Maybe you can call this part of the World Wide Web the "Drag-Net."

With the backing of the Holland City Council and a lot of officer initiative, the Holland Police Department recently unveiled its own Internet home page, full of officer profiles, program information and department statistics.

The site -- which can be found at www.ci.holland.mi.us/police/ -- is linked to the city of Holland's main Web site. But unlike many other police home pages, it is maintained by the police department itself, according to Doug Nibbelink, the city's website coordinator.

"It's one of the city's goals to have police, fire and other departments maintain their own sites to represent themselves to citizens and it's becoming fairly common for police agencies to have their own sites," Nibbelink said. "But very few are as
extensive as this. There's literally something for everyone."

In addition to profiling the department's various anti-crime programs, the Web site also has maps of community policing districts, a full-length copy of the department's 1997 annual report, officer photos and even job notices and applications.

"Our goal is to have a site that anyone who happens to visit would learn something of interest about the department," said Drew Torres, the community policing officer who estimates he spent 100 hours over the last few months programming the home page.

Police Chief John Kruithoff said the Web site will generate enough interest that residents in community policing areas would post incident accounts online to inform their neighbors.

"This is a great awareness tool, because it doesn't only inform people about what services we have available, but can make them more aware of what's happening in their neighborhoods," Kruithoff said. "And anytime you're more aware, that's preventive crime-fighting."

He said the site also has the potential to help solve crime through a section that profiles unsolved cases where leads have gone dry. The site now displays only two burglary cases from 1996, but more are expected to be listed as detectives get more time to devote to the project.

"Hopefully we won't have to put that many on there, but you can never have too much information and you never know where any of it will lead," Kruithoff said.

According to a telephone survey conducted by Hope College's Carl Frost Center for Social Science Research released in January, 48 percent of Holland city residents have personal computers in their homes. Fifty-seven percent of those residents said they have Internet access and 84 percent said they would want to use government services from the Internet. Thirty-six percent of Holland residents without home computers said
they would be interested in accessing government services from the Internet at public places such as the Herrick District Library.

Though it's hard to gauge how many people are visiting the home page at this point, Torres said user feedback has already exceeded expectations.

"We're linked to several other national police sites on the Internet and have had messages from Boston, California and Kentucky, and foreign countries like England and Canada," he said. "It just gives you an idea of how far-reaching the Internet is."

Planned additions to the site include a copy of the city's animal control ordinance, an e-mail directory for all department officers, and a wanted fugitive list to help people recognize bail jumpers, Torres said.

Work will begin on a separate page for the Holland Fire Department within the next few weeks, and Internet users can expect to see a new design on the city's home page for easier navigation, Nibbelink said.

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